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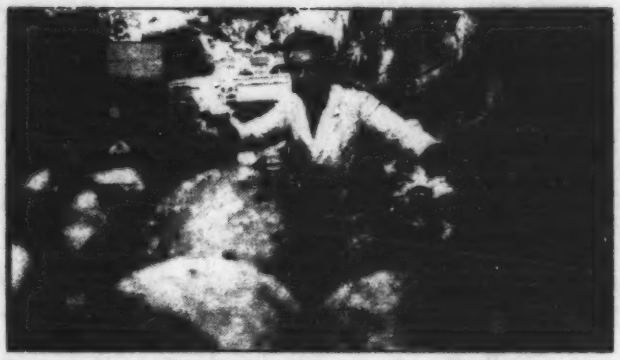

Plantee sus puntos de vista

"What We Heard..."

A Summary of the Community Consultations held for the Metropolitan Toronto Social Development Strategy Task Force

Metropolitan Toronto, April 1991

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Preface

In September, 1989, Metropolitan Toronto Council took on an exciting challenge – developing the first social plan for our city. They established a Task Force of Metropolitan Councillors, chaired by Councillor Brian Ashton, which organized an extensive community consultation process.

In 1990, over 2,000 residents from all parts of Metropolitan Toronto participated in 59 public meetings hosted by Councillors in our 28 Metro wards. In addition, 11 special meetings were held with members of the Chinese, Vietnamese, Hispanic, Francophone, Italian, Portuguese, South Asian, Native and Black communities.

At these meetings, a wide variety of residents participated, often in lively debate. The Task Force asked these questions:

- What do you value most about Metro?
- What do you find most difficult about living here?
- What are your community's main social needs?
- How adequate/appropriate are our services to meet those needs?
- What improvements would you like to see over the next ten years?
- How can we keep Metro a liveable place for everyone?

This report represents our best efforts to summarize what we heard. The opinions expressed throughout the community consultations have been critical to the completion of "Strengthening Our Communities" – the Interim Report of the Metropolitan Toronto Social Development Strategy Task Force.

If you are interested in receiving a copy of the report "Strengthening Our Communities", please contact:

The Social Development Strategy Task Force
Policy & Planning Division
Community Services Department
The Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto

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Summaries of "Strengthening Our Communities" are also available in French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Hindi.

The Metropolitan Toronto Social Development Strategy Task Force
April, 1991

Printed on recycled paper

What was said

The range of opinions that emerged at the consultations was as diverse as Metro's population. However, there were some common concerns that came up again and again. These include the high cost of living in Metro, with particular emphasis on the high cost of housing and the lack of affordable housing. People are also dismayed by the growing number of people living in poverty who are increasingly visible because they are homeless, use foodbanks frequently and depend on welfare for their livelihood.

Many are concerned about racism, but also about what they see as increased demands for social services by Metro's immigrant and refugee communities. People are also worried about the cost and quality of childcare, the lack of options for youth, violence against women and children and safety concerns in general.

Almost everyone is concerned about the state of our environment – a problem that goes well beyond our municipal boundaries.

High cost of living

At every meeting, people talked about the pressures associated with Metro's high cost of living. They described the stress of trying to survive in an expensive city where housing eats up income, leaving little for food and clothing and almost nothing for comfort and recreation. They talked of the lack of help for caring for children, dependent older people, or disabled relatives when families must have two wage earners to cope with expenses. They said that the salaries paid in many service sector jobs are so low that many working people live below the poverty level. The alternative, general welfare assistance, is often just a ticket to hunger.

Research shows that many traditional manufacturing jobs in Metro have been lost through automation in industry and through firms moving to lower cost regions. As a result, over three quarters of Metro's jobs are now in the lower paying service sector. There are, of course, some jobs that offer very high wages at the professional and management levels, but these tend to require high skill or education levels. It's not difficult to see why the issue of having a well paying job to survive in Metro came up again and again.

"Most jobs advertised are minimum wage. That makes living in many parts of Metro impossible. Wages don't match the cost of living."

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People want access to a wide range of employment opportunities. They prefer jobs near their homes. Unfortunately, part-time and minimum-wage work have become the only option for some people, contributing significantly to the numbers of the working poor. This situation has an impact primarily on women and their children because they are likely to be stuck in part-time and low paying jobs.

Poverty

Any discussion of the high cost of living leads to discussion about poverty. Everyone is concerned about the increase in the use of foodbanks, homelessness and the growing numbers of women and children who are forced to live in poverty. Most people feel that the gap between the rich and poor is widening and they feel uncomfortable seeing these extremes of wealth and poverty. People do agree though, that the disadvantaged should be helped but there were many differing opinions on how to do this.

Everyone believes that a well paying job is the best way out of poverty. However, obtaining a good job is very difficult for many poor people who believe their appearance counts against them. They believe their sex, race, age or poor appearance is an issue when applying for jobs. This in turn is likely to mean they lack confidence to present themselves well at employment offices. Some even fear trying for a better job or any job at all.

People tell us then, that poverty is very often linked to discrimination, whether on the basis of race, sex or age. They also believe that people who don't – or can't – achieve basic levels of education are likely to always be subject to poverty.

On the one hand, people feel that the root causes of poverty must be addressed.

" Band-Aid solutions do not attack the root causes of poverty. Governments must provide mechanisms and structures to enable people to live in dignity and address their own issues."

This will mean offering more job training and literacy programs, higher wages and benefit payments for people forced to live on social assistance. It will also entail eliminating discrimination based on age, race, ethnicity, sex, gender or socio-economic status. As one person put it:

"Band-Aid solutions do not attack the root causes of poverty. Governments must provide mechanisms and structures to enable people to live in dignity and address their own issues."

No one said that more money would cure everything, but everyone said nothing would get better without money.

On the other hand, some people believe that while people who are in extreme need through no fault of their own must be helped, there should be more checks to prevent abuse of the system by employable people. They want to see more creativity in finding solutions to help poor people, not solutions which require raising taxes to pay for more social programs.

Getting access to information and services

Participants at many different meetings stressed that it was difficult to describe the services they would like from Metro when they don't know what services Metro now provides, or how to go about finding out about these services.

We discovered that many people aren't aware of what services are available and what they are entitled to. For example, many elderly people don't have knowledge of how to get someone to help them stay in their homes. Racial minorities or new Canadians don't know where to find family counselling. Youth wonder where they can learn skills that will help them get, and keep, good jobs.

Even when Metro residents know where the services are, they may feel uncomfortable using them. People who are applying for welfare feel they may be humiliated.

The idea of a central registry often came up. Many people suggested a one-stop Metro service: "Hi. I live in Etobicoke. Where can I find a recreational program for my ten-year-old daughter who is hearing-impaired?" Or "Where can I get help for my father who has Alzheimer disease and doesn't speak English?"

Even people whose first language is English say they can't understand government pamphlets or application forms because they are too bureaucratic.

Literacy

" I heard there were jobs at this factory. When I went there, they didn't want to talk to me. They just gave me an application form to fill out. That made me feel very bad because I couldn't read or fill out the form. But I know I can do the work."

Many people told us that poverty and illiteracy are mutually reinforcing. Not being able to read or write in our society puts people at a severe disadvantage. Research indicates that about 27 per cent of Metro's residents are functionally illiterate. Their reading, writing and number skills are too low for them to function well in the community. For these people job opportunities are especially limited.

"I heard there were jobs at this factory. When I went there, they didn't want to talk to me. They just gave me an application form to fill out. That made me feel very bad because I couldn't read or fill out the form. But I know I can do the work."

People who aren't literate often face many barriers and risks. Mothers who can't read have difficulty finding remedies for their children's colds – one mother told us she almost gave her baby an adult medication. A skilled painter who couldn't read was limited because directions for mixing colours were meaningless to him.

Participants stressed that there needs to be more community and workplace based adult literacy programs to deal with these problems. Many people felt that Government, business and the community must all work together to eliminate illiteracy. The social and economic costs of illiteracy are too high not to be addressed.

The neighbourhood scale

In one way or another, people told us that they want their city to be planned and operated on a human scale. They want choices, not imposed solutions. In other words, they want Metro to remain a humane, safe, clean city that works; one where all residents have the means to take advantage of the wealth of opportunities Metro has to offer.

Residents feel strongly that they want a say in decisions that affect their lives.

This decade's buzz word for individuals and communities is empowerment. The word has become stale with use but the mood of frustration and alienation that lies behind it is still raw. Many people feel that decision-making processes are no longer accountable to the people affected and that bureaucratic processes are too cumbersome and impersonal.

Many people talked of preserving "a sense of community" in Metro. Community was meant in a variety of ways ranging from a geographic description, to an ethno-racial, cultural or interest group. This means that although we live in a very large urban Metropolis, people value and want to keep the small networks they create within this.

Housing: From homelessness to monster homes

" What do people on fixed incomes do when the rent goes up? "

Housing in Metro, whether for purchase or rent, is too expensive for many people. People on low and fixed incomes find it especially difficult to get affordable housing.

"What do people on fixed incomes do when the rent goes up?"

As a result, many people live in overcrowded or low-quality housing. Homelessness is becoming more visible and people are shocked that so many of the homeless living on the streets are young.

"Everyone suggests, 'Get a job.' But you can't get a job if you don't have a home because you can't receive phone calls, you can't put an address down on an application form, you can't ... you can't ... "

What's happening? The irony is that some old people are living alone in large homes, often because there is no acceptable alternative.

"There are so many people who could use both the income and the company that comes with having a basement apartment. But where I live in Metro they aren't legal."

At the same time, the demand for low-cost apartments and homeowners' needs for help in paying high mortgages have led to the creation of illegal accessory apartments that are not subject to any form of regulation.

People wonder if the housing of the future is going to be different, and they fear the situation could get worse, not better.

"How realistic is the dream of a single, detached family house in Metro?"

Additionally, Metro residents are strongly opposed to concentrations of subsidized housing. People don't want the mistakes of the past repeated.

They also worry about the influence of developers on politicians. People want a central clearing house of information about vacancies, tenants' rights, development opportunities, and proposals. Some landlords, they say, abuse tenants by demanding key money and discriminating on the basis of age, income, and family status. Teenage mothers and their babies, one of the most vulnerable of all family units, find doors closed to them.

To solve the housing problem, some people suggested that Metro should explore the European models of higher density housing on main streets, where many of the basic services are already in place. In fact, housing intensification was discussed in many different ways ranging from creating accessory apartments in houses to building new subdivisions made up of low-rise apartments. Also, new affordable housing developments could be introduced in areas of low density.

Despite agreeing that more affordable housing is greatly needed in Metropolitan Toronto, many people recognized that efforts to increase density will be difficult. For example, community reaction to high density developments has often been negative. "NIMBY" (Not in My Backyard) reactions have usually been against density levels, scale, design and who is likely to live in those developments. Some people suggested that to overcome this, additional services will have to be provided. New developments must be integrated into existing communities in a non threatening way and there will need to be public education to sensitize people to the need for affordable housing in their neighbourhood.

Many tenants expressed feelings of uncertainty and felt a lack of control over factors such as lease renewals and rent increases. They want to be free of such insecurity and wish that home ownership was in their grasp. People who live in housing provided by the Metro Toronto Housing Authority (MTHA) are especially frustrated. They speak of the lack of opportunity for resident participation in housing management, or the development of security policy, and other day-to-day issues that influence their lives.

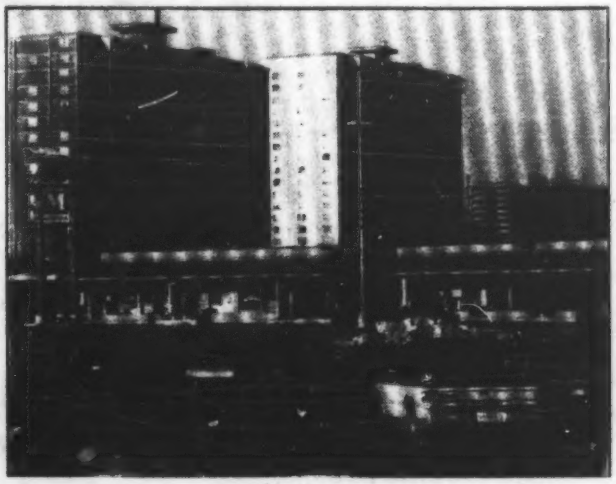
" Everyone suggests, 'Get a job.' But you can't get a job if you don't have a home because you can't receive phone calls, you can't put an address down on an application form, you can't ... you can't ... "

" There are so many people who could use both the income and the company that comes with having a basement apartment. But where I live in Metro they aren't legal. "

Many people hate monster homes and speculators. They believe politicians too readily go along with developers because of the revenue that costly buildings bring in. They also hate and dread high-rise, high-density housing unless provisions are made to protect dignity, privacy, and pleasurable common areas. Many people are anxious. "What's happening in my neighbourhood?" they ask.

"Housing is a living space, not just a tax base."

The Metropolitan region is filling up with buildings. Available land for new housing is almost exhausted. People, feeling the pressure of density, are deeply worried. But people are also clear that any new housing initiatives should include a mix of units that attract a broad range of people. No one wants ghettos.



Transportation and the environment

At almost every meeting, concerns about the environment sparked lively exchange. People stressed how much they value the parks, ravines and green space in Metro. They urged that efforts must be made to preserve these urban 'treasures' and to clean up polluted areas like the beaches.

Many people were extremely worried about Metro's garbage problems and recognized that difficult decisions must be made to find both short and long-term solutions. Many residents were aware of the importance of the "3 R's" - reduce, reuse, recycle. They love Metro's blue box program and want it expanded.

Any discussion of environmental issues in an urban context leads naturally to discussions about transportation, since cars are a major source of pollution. Many people complained about increased traffic congestion and pollution all across Metro, noting that improving the public transit system would encourage people to use their cars less and therefore reduce pollution.

"I think Metro should impose stricter emission control standards for cars, so that our air quality will improve."

" I think Metro should impose stricter emission control standards for cars, so that our air quality will improve."

" You can't have a healthy social environment without a healthy physical environment."

Metro's transit system is critical to all residents. Much like Canadians two hundred years ago made use of rivers, people today use subways, streetcars, and buses.

Certain people face real barriers when trying to get around Metro. People with mobility impairments are at a particular disadvantage when subways and buses have impassable stairs.

Some people in the suburbs complain that all roads seem to lead to downtown Toronto, although their own destinations often lie elsewhere. Without a car, moving across Metro from east to west is a time consuming and frustrating affair.

"It's not fair that all transit is geared to downtown."

Some Metro residents think that public transportation has become too expensive. They would use it more, and get to enjoy Metro, but they can't afford to ride. They complain that buses and subways are too crowded and that this prevents some people who own cars from using public transit. Some people, particularly women, also expressed concern about the safety of using the public transit system.

People pointed out again and again that addressing environmental problems, in conjunction with social and economic problems, is crucial to improving and preserving the quality of life for all residents.

"You can't have a healthy social environment without a healthy physical environment."

The not-so-hidden barriers of race and culture

Members of the ethno-specific groups consulted by the Task Force share most of the same concerns as everyone else: the lack of childcare spaces and affordable housing, poverty, crime (especially the involvement of youth with drugs), and congested traffic. People in Metro have more in common than they may realize.

But one significant difference emerged. Everything is harder for newcomers and ethno-racial minorities, because they bear the brunt of racism and discrimination. Linguistic, racial, and systemic barriers exist everywhere they turn.

Examples of such discrimination abound. For instance, a white teenage mother may have difficulty finding housing for herself and her baby, but a black teenage mother finds it next to impossible. Racism hurts but, even worse, it denies people the benefits and resources they are entitled to as residents of Metro.

"My baby was just four pounds at birth. The doctors assumed I was smoking and drinking during my pregnancy, just because I'm Native. But I wasn't at all."

Many people from Metro's diverse ethno-racial communities believe that people in positions of authority are often insensitive and unwittingly reinforce stereotypes. They spoke of the lack of representation in the media and other areas of influence.

" My baby was just four pounds at birth. The doctors assumed I was smoking and drinking during my pregnancy, just because I'm Native. But I wasn't at all. "

" Two evenings a week, it takes a long time to learn English."

Social services often aren't culturally sensitive or even accessible. Members of our ethno-racial communities encounter paternalistic attitudes everywhere they go.

Some people stressed that if insufficient housing, employment opportunities and community services are not available, as is the case now, rising immigration levels may make social tensions between new immigrants and the established community worse.

Others felt that high levels of immigration strain already stretched services and make unemployment worse. This was countered by participants who pointed out that these demands could be drastically reduced by allowing refugees to work while waiting for their claims to be processed. At the moment they are forced to depend on welfare. This, in turn, would be beneficial to Metro's economy.

Participants spoke of the hurdles refugees and many new immigrants must overcome to adjust to a new country. They are separated from family and homeland, their education and training is discounted, their future is uncertain as they wait long periods while their claims are being processed and some of them have been shattered by torture or war. The cultural adjustment required is tremendous.

Often, people recognized that new immigrants and refugees face higher rates of unemployment and that their stress is compounded by major language barriers which makes finding a job even harder. This also means that they often can't find information about existing services in their own language. Language and job training therefore is seen to be crucial to integrating new immigrants and refugees into Canadian society. Some people think Metro should play this role and if it can't, then to put pressure on other levels of Government. They stressed that all language and job training programs should build on the skills and experience people have already acquired in their country of origin.

"Foreign-trained professionals can't get accreditation. Yet they could fill many needs."

"Two evenings a week, it takes a long time to learn English."

Many participants stressed that new immigrants and refugees choose to live in Metro because they seek a better life for themselves and their children. Most recognize the wealth of ideas, experience and networks from around the world that these newcomers bring. Participants believe immigrants are motivated to get ahead, but that they may need some help to get established. For instance, appropriate services should be available to allow immigrants to participate fully in the community. However, newcomers in turn must make the effort and have the will to be part of the wider community.

Members of ethno-racial communities and service workers stressed that racial and cultural sensitivities and the language capacities of all social service agencies, must expand in order to meet new needs. This may require increased funding for ethno-specific agencies which can meet some specific needs of their communities. In addition, mainstream agencies may need more resources to increase their language capabilities to effectively serve their clients.

Many people feel that Metro should be a model employer by having staff at all levels representative of the community at large. They believe this will help ensure that clients are served in a culturally sensitive manner and in their own languages.

In addition, Metro should have its own translation/interpretation bureau for both internal and public use.

"If Metro is asking its funded agencies to become culturally sensitive, it should put its own house in order."

" If Metro is asking its funded agencies to become culturally sensitive, it should put its own house in order."

Old and young: The barriers of age

" Older people must be given the support they need to age in their own communities."

At all the consultations, elderly people turned out in great numbers. The strong message they brought is that the aged should be able to remain in their own communities or with their families as long as possible.

As one person said so succinctly:

"Older people must be given the support they need to age in their own communities."

People who need assistance to stay in their homes are frustrated when they have to wait for scarce home-help services. If they must turn to institutions for their care, they again encounter a waiting list. They'd like to see innovative housing and community programs to support older people. They said that services now are poorly co-ordinated. In fact, people stressed that there is a need to examine the gaps in services for seniors in the areas of health and nutrition, housing and recreation. All of these services together can keep seniors in their homes instead of forcing them into hospitals.

"We, seniors, should advocate and lobby for our own interests."

"North American society has ageist attitudes. It views seniors as no longer of use...

It is now time to include everyone, including seniors, in society."

Seniors are also concerned about the provision of ethno-specific services and proposed that appropriate programs be available for elderly immigrants.

Just as clearly, a society that doesn't care properly for its children has no future: participants at every meeting made this point. Many of them also told us that investing in children and youth is cheaper and more effective than waiting until adults emerge with a fixed set of problems. Prevention makes sense.

Families often require two incomes to stay above the poverty line, so accessible, affordable, flexible, high-quality childcare is a paramount need. By high quality they mean a daycare environment that is stimulating, affectionate, and stable. They mean a daycare where the staff is trained and paid well enough to feel valued, thus avoiding high turnover.

Again people spoke of a return to a neighbourhood scale: childcare, they said, should be close to children's homes or where parents work. Childcare alternatives must include workplace daycare, particularly for infants. At many meetings people observed that corporations and businesses aren't taking their fair share of responsibility for childcare. Participants noted too that childcare hours should be flexible. Many parents work irregular shifts and a growing number of them hold part-time jobs. Over and over, parents spoke of the frustration and hardship created by the long waiting list for subsidies.

"Daycare centres have spaces that are empty because there are not enough dollars for subsidies. What can we do to get more money for daycare subsidies?"

Some participants also mentioned the need for supports – financial and recreational – for stay-home mothers, whose service to the community goes largely unacknowledged and unrewarded. They say Metro Toronto needs to develop a model of respite care to assist parents undergoing stress. Drop-in parent-child centres and park programs need to concentrate on the small child's need for stimulating play experience.

People suggested that Metro needs training programs in parenting skills, which could be delivered through the network of parent/child centres. This need grows with the increasing stress on all families, particularly those with one parent, latchkey children.

"People must take into account the needs of children when designing community space."

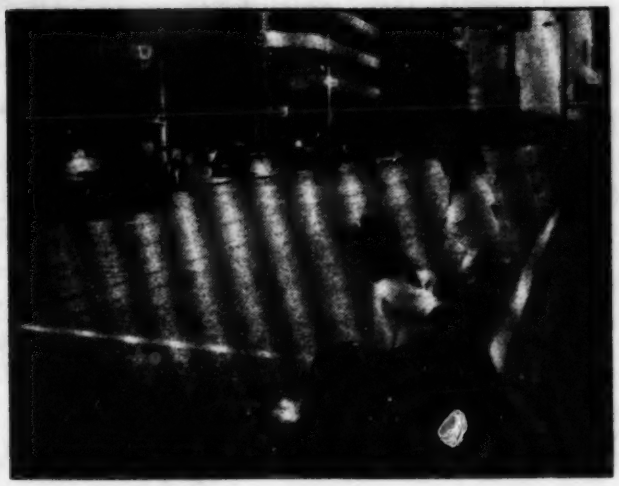
" North American society has ageist attitudes. It views seniors as no longer of use... It is now time to include everyone, including seniors, in society."

" Why do we always have to fight to obtain good programs for children? Children should be our priority."

School-age children require after-school programs. A television set is not a desirable baby-sitter.

Moreover, childcare options are often not sensitive to the needs of racial and religious minorities. Programs and staff should accommodate the needs of the communities they serve.

"Why do we always have to fight to obtain good programs for children? Children should be our priority."



Disability issues

People with disabilities make up an estimated 13 per cent of Metro's population. But no one would claim that supports for them represent anything near 13 per cent of available services. Persons with psychiatric disabilities make up a substantial part of the homeless who roam Metro's streets.

People with disabilities are very often poor and face the same lack of affordable housing that able-bodied people do, with the difference that they must find housing designed and adapted for their disability, which is a near impossibility.

More and more persons with disabilities are moving out of institutions and into communities where they are living independently. To help this process along, there is a need for strong community-support services.

Aside from Wheeltrans, the public transit system is often not accessible. People told us Wheeltrans is often unreliable. Seniors and people with disabilities alike agree that the public transit system is very difficult to use.

"Inadequate accessible transit leads to isolation. It is difficult for persons with disabilities to use the subways."

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In addition, employment and training opportunities for people with disabilities are scarce to non-existent. This often leads to chronic economic hardship, on top of limited social and recreational choices.

Metro's youth

While the Social Development Strategy Task Force was conducting community consultations, another group, the Metro Youth Task Force, was consulting with youth workers, parents, and teenagers themselves. After seventeen meetings in which participants expressed their concerns and visions, this Task Force identified issues similar to those heard in the other community consultations.

For one, the Metro Youth Task Force found that many young people feel alienated from their families, and families alienated from teenagers.

"Complete strangers can be your own blood."

At the same time, some parents spoke of being "unable to reach" their teenage children. The consultations uncovered widespread criticism of the school system from parents, students and teachers. They said that children are forced to conform; if they don't – or can't – then they are likely to not succeed. School failure, participants noted, sets children up for a lifetime of failure.

People also thought the schools should be more in touch with immigrant parents, who have difficulty understanding curriculum information and who fear teachers will see them as ignorant if they voice their concerns. They were very concerned

" School is the first thing to give up when you're out on your own. It's hard to juggle jobs and school. When it comes down to it, it is more important to eat and have a place to sleep than to go to school."

" They think all kids want to do is play basketball. I'm not into that. "

about the high drop-out rate, particularly among children of the poor. Some people felt that teachers often don't understand the community where their students come from, and that the teachers should have more support to work more flexibly with individual students.

"School is the first thing to give up when you're out on your own. It's hard to juggle jobs and school. When it comes down to it, it is more important to eat and have a place to sleep than to go to school."

Again and again the Youth Task Force heard about the need for more affordable, attractive, social-recreational facilities for youth, designed with the involvement of the young people who will use them. Many people expressed concern over cutbacks in after-school programs, fearing that this trend will only lead more young people to other, more negative activities such as drug use.

Some people even went so far as to say that youth take drugs because of insufficient recreation programs.

As one youth said:

"They think all kids want to do is play basketball. I'm not into that."

"What we need are cheap places to hang out."

A large number of young people who were consulted see a bleak future for themselves in Metro. They certainly believe they will be worse off than their parents. Many of them say they'll never get a well-paying job. They'll never live in a good house. What they feel at heart, is that they'll never have a good life.

Young people in Toronto, serving hamburgers or doing similar jobs, earn incomes that are below the poverty line. For many who are out on their own, these are the only available jobs. They feel their education didn't prepare them for the realities of the job market.

"There is little effort in the education system and private business to encourage job training."

Young people on the street are often either runaways from abusive situations – sexual abuse is astonishingly common – or throwaways from homes that no longer want them. Their situation is desperate: no housing, no food, no skills, and poor self-esteem.

"Sometimes it's hard to imagine a different life than on the street. Even if change is for the better, it's scary. You feel more at home in what you're used to."

Young people in special situations – people with disabilities, the children of immigrants, those on welfare – are especially disadvantaged.

There was little consensus among youth about gangs. Some felt that the media and the police have sensationalized the gang issue, making it into a much bigger problem than it really is. A few youth expressed some fears about potential gang violence, while some others described gangs as the only 'family' they feel they have.

Many youth distrust the police. They spoke of police discrimination against young people and, in particular, Native or racial minority youth.

Both youth service workers and youth themselves feel that young people often fall between the gaps in service provision. Sometimes, they are too old to be eligible for services geared to children and too young for adult services.

Youth shelters, for example, are in short supply, particularly in the suburbs. Many youth want to be able to continue their schooling in the school they know best. But if they need shelter they may have to change schools, and indeed their community and friends.

They like the idea of drop-in centres for youth with a sympathetic staff ready to listen when asked. They want staff that doesn't push counselling at them as the ticket for admission. Most of all, they want to be included when adults are talking about helping youth. They have a certain expertise to offer, they noted wryly.

"Services for youth should be based on where you are and not where adults would like you to be."

" Services for youth should be based on where you are and not where adults would like you to be. "

Crime and policing

" Rehabilitation will not happen and drug dealing will not stop if we can't get good jobs. "

For many people, certain buildings, malls, and parks have become distinctly unsafe. Residents of MTHA buildings were particularly alarmed by violent incidents involving drug dealers.

"Dealers just move from one neighbourhood to another. It's like having cockroaches in your building; spraying doesn't work."

"We can't even let our kids play in the park any more because of all the needles."

Some people see the problem as a straightforward law-and-order issue and want the police to have more resources to deal with it. Others think it would be better to put resources into prevention, by alleviating poverty and youth alienation. They see education and job training opportunities for youth as inextricably linked to an assault on drug abuse. They also note the lack of treatment programs for addicts. They wonder what the community has to offer a rehabilitated addict.

"Rehabilitation will not happen and drug dealing will not stop if we can't get good jobs."

As poverty deepens across Metro, crime appears (not surprisingly) to be increasing. In some parts of Metro, residents say they now fear for their lives.

Viewpoints about the police and the job they do, ranged from the very critical to others who admired the officers who "serve and protect".

"The police have a really tough job. They need all the support we can give them."

Some people think that staff at all levels on the police force need to be more representative of the diverse ethno-racial groups in Metro, and that this will contribute to achieving more harmonious race relations.

"It's a problem that most police hired are white. Police should look at their own organization and implement mandatory employment equity and race-relations training internally at all levels."

Participants also talked about physical violence and the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of women and children, as well as the vulnerability of elderly people. Abused women say they don't have the support of the criminal justice or social service systems, and that few support services exist for older abuse victims.

"Shelters are inadequate for women's needs. They are institutions, not homes. The women and children suffer while the men who perpetrate the violence remain in the comfort of their homes."

The result of escaping an abusive relationship is often poverty and homelessness for the victim – or even death. Many women, at great risk, are forced to remain in abusive situations. The consequences for their children, not to mention themselves, are devastating. Social workers believe that many of Metro's young prostitutes and homeless youth come from abusive families. And, as in almost every other context, participants noted that there was not enough knowledge about, let alone access to, Metro's safety net.

"Finding out about different services is really a question of luck."

" Shelters are inadequate for women's needs. They are institutions, not homes. The women and children suffer while the men who perpetrate the violence remain in the comfort of their homes."

Community services

" Waiting lists are so long that services are only about crisis intervention rather than prevention. "

There were differing opinions expressed about the role and nature of community services. Many service workers stressed that too many jurisdictions are involved in too fragmented a way in planning and delivering services in Metro. They, and their clients, want a more integrated, intimate, holistic approach – a community-centre kind of resource, which the whole community would help plan and which would function in their neighbourhood. Information about all programs would be available in one location.

A community-based, multi-faceted centre would focus more on prevention and on fostering independence. But, to succeed it must be funded adequately.

"Waiting lists are so long that services are only about crisis intervention rather than prevention."

From a differing point of view, some people wanted the government to be more selective in providing assistance. They felt that community services programs should be run more efficiently and that eligibility to receive benefits should be tied to a willingness to work or obtain job training. They were strongly opposed to increasing taxes to pay for more services.

The neighbourhood community centre could address common sources of criticism about the range of services available in Metro, which is that they are "anonymous", "impersonal", "dehumanizing", "inadequate", "insensitive", "culturally insensitive", and "outside the control of people who use them".

"The looking-for-work system must have been designed by people who are never out of work. They presume I'm guilty ... This system has pushed down my human feeling."

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Metro residents pointed out that salaries and working conditions in the community-service sector are too low, making it difficult to keep experienced staff or to continue to attract skilled and dedicated workers. Those that do stay experience high stress levels, and impossibly large caseloads, but they are still expected to be able to provide personal service to each client.

In addition to huge caseloads, anxieties about fundraising, and the constant threat that government support will be reduced, all result in an increased use of unpaid volunteers. These unpaid volunteers then become an uncertain element in program planning. In any case, they are in short supply.

Participants also noted that "those who have, get". The parts of Metro Toronto with the best tax-base seem to have the best services. Several people commented about the need for a fairer system that does not discriminate against the poorer parts of the region. People also felt that any services provided in particular areas must reflect the ethno-racial mix of that area.

Service workers stressed that funding for social and community services should be better co-ordinated and more adequate. They spoke of fragmention, gaps, inefficiencies, and duplication. They feel over-taxed and under-consulted about decisions made.

"Agencies spend more time chasing funding dollars than on providing services."

"Spending priorities are skewed. Money is available for facilities like the Dome, but not for affordable housing and accessible social services."

To successfully integrate new immigrants and refugees, they stressed that Metro Toronto must provide adequate job training, further income assistance, English language training, housing, education, health, employment, family and individual counselling, daycare and other community services are required. Once on their feet, these people will undoubtedly contribute an enormous amount to the social, economic and cultural life of Metro.

" Spending priorities are skewed. Money is available for facilities like the Dome, but not for affordable housing and accessible social services."

As many participants pointed out, adequate social services benefit everyone in the community. They prevent serious social problems that can make neighbourhoods unpleasant, depressing, or dangerous.

Conclusions

At the consultation meetings, people told us what was on their minds. They said they were worried about the high cost of housing, traffic congestion, public transit, and taxes. They talked about the difficulty they have making ends meet and about crime, homelessness, youth gangs, and drugs. They talked about safety on the streets, about the deteriorating environment, and about the need for more services to support seniors and people with disabilities in the community.

They also noted that Metro is becoming truly cosmopolitan. There are more people from diverse backgrounds, more jobs, more businesses, more things to do.

At every meeting people spoke of their desire to be consulted about changes to their communities. They made the point that services with roots in the community tend to flourish, while services designed by others – however well-intentioned and well-advised – generally don't work as well. People want a say in decision-making.

Task Force Members

- Councillor Brian Ashton (Chair)
- Councillor Norm Gardner
- Mayor David Johnson
- Councillor Joan King
- Councillor Dale Martin
- Councillor Dick O'Brien
- Councillor Joe Pantalone
- Councillor Maureen Prinsloo
- Metro Chairman Alan Tonks